

The Macomb Daily (macombdaily.com), Serving Macomb County

News

Utica mayor thinking Hollywood

Sterling Heights, Shelby officials also discuss visions

Thursday, January 29, 2009 4:19 PM EST

By Frank DeFrank, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

She's the mayor of one of Macomb County's smallest communities, but Jackie Noonan thinks big.

Citing a new state law designed to entice movie makers to come to Michigan, Noonan said Utica — and by extension, Macomb County— should be on the forefront of such efforts.

"Utica is adding a film office to its Web site," Noonan said Wednesday during the annual State of the Tri-Community Luncheon at Cherry Creek Golf Club in Shelby Township.

Boasting of her city's small-town charm, historic district and other attributes, Noonan predicted Utica would offer potential filmmakers "almost everything they would want."

Her honor's optimism may not be far-fetched. Last spring, Michigan lawmakers adopted lucrative tax incentives that reimburse film companies up to 42 percent of their expenses if they shoot in Michigan.

Those incentives prompted a surge in interest in Michigan from Hollywood. Some 65 films are in the works that will be shot in the Great Lakes State, according to figures provided at a state-sponsored workshop.

While the film industry spent \$3 million in Michigan in all of 2007, in the first eight months under the new law production companies had already spent \$167 million in the state.

Perhaps most famously, the acclaimed "Gran Torino" starring Clint Eastwood was shot in several Michigan locations, including a scene at a Center Line VFW hall.

So why not Utica, Noonan reasoned.

"We're going to become the Hollywood of the Midwest," she said.

One member of the audience, Utica Community Schools Superintendent Christine Johns, suggested Noonan could be on the right track.

While employed in Pasadena, Calif., several years ago, Johns said her district worked with filmmakers and benefited from the experience. Under the right circumstances, she'd welcome the same attention to Utica.

What's good for the community, is good for the schools, Johns said.

"All of this is connected," she said.

Each year, the chief elected officials of Shelby Township, Sterling Heights and Utica highlight their communities at the event hosted by the Sterling Heights Area Chamber of Commerce.

Noonan, an 11-term incumbent, gave her address Wednesday along with longtime Sterling Heights Mayor Richard Notte and Shelby Township Supervisor Richard Stathakis.

All three elected officials highlighted the accomplishment of their communities.

Notte pointed to national publications like Money magazine that ranked Sterling Heights among the safest and best communities to live in the United States.

He also noted General Dynamics Land Systems and other firms announced expansion plans in 2008.

But he also noted the challenges, notably economic, that lie ahead.

"Our community is holding up fairly well," Notte said. "(But) we have four auto plants and we're keeping our fingers crossed that they survive."

Stathakis, the newcomer of the trio, also focused his remarks on economic challenges.

The Shelby Township supervisor said local government "must drastically change the way we do business" because of an economy that has "drastically changed."

To illustrate his point, Stathakis said, "plans to expand (the Shelby Township) municipal campus has run up against the reality of difficult economic times."

"... None of us expect the road ahead will be easy," he said.

URL: <http://www.macombdaily.com/articles/2009/01/29/news/srv0000004591454.prt>

© 2009 macombdaily.com, a **Journal Register** Property